



### 2.08 GSAR WINTER RESPONSE

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#### 2.08.1 RELATED DOCUMENTS

- GSAR Winter Response Policy

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#### 2.08.2 FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

##### WINTER SAFETY PLANNING

Q: Are ground search and rescue (GSAR) groups required to develop their own avalanche safety plan (ASP)?

A: No. EMBC has created an ASP for all public safety lifeline organizations. EMBC does not expect volunteer GSAR groups to develop their own ASPs.

It is suggested that GSAR groups develop winter response plans that provide specific information concerning group capability, group equipment, and external resources. Winter Response Pre-Plan (Appendix A) should be completed and filed with your Regional EMBC office. This information is not intended to be used by the Regional office for a response, but to confirm the group has an established Winter Response Pre-plan in place.

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Q: Can volunteer organizations develop their own ASP?

A: Yes, however it would need to meet or exceed the EMBC Public Safety Lifeline Volunteer (PSLV) ASP. Any ASP developed by a volunteer search and rescue organization will need to be signed off by a qualified person and filed with EMBC. WorkSafe BC and the Canadian Avalanche Association provide information on avalanche safety planning.

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Q: What is the process to provide feedback on the Winter Response Policy and ASP?

A: Feedback can be submitted through BCSARA or directly to EMBC. EMBC will be reviewing the ASP and winter response policies following the 2019/20 winter season.

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Q: What is the difference between the ASP and an Avalanche Operations Plan (AOP)?

A: ASPs are developed to characterize the planned approach to managing avalanche risk. AOPs are developed and implemented at the beginning of an operation and are specific to the location where you plan to conduct on-site operations, operational requirements, as well as weather, snowpack, and avalanche conditions at the time of the training or incident. Specifically, the EMBC PSLV ASP does not address issues of available equipment and operational procedures at the group- or site- level. It is expected that GSAR groups include this information in their winter response plans.



### **AVALANCHE OPERATIONS PLAN (AOP)**

Q: When is an AOP required?

A: An AOP is required for both training and response where on-site operations occur within an area with potential for avalanche risk.

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Q: What are the expectations of GSAR groups in identifying and/or mapping avalanche risk zones in their response area?

A: Groups should access existing avalanche terrain inventories such as those completed by local authorities, industrial operators, and other land managers. For areas where no detailed risk assessment and/or no terrain classification exists, the expectation is that major avalanche risk zones are identified. Examples of methods used to accomplish this requirement include the following:

- a review by the Avalanche Safety Officer (ASO) utilizing a topographic map and/or Google Earth™ to identify and indicate the major avalanche risk zones. This information could then be faxed and/or emailed to the Avalanche Site Safety Officer (ASSO). It is expected that with accurate information concerning the incident location, this could be accomplished in a reasonably short period. It is also recognized that for historical/frequent response areas, this can be done ahead of time in anticipation of future operations.
- Using the “Line Locator” method described in the Land Managers Guide to Snow Avalanche Hazard in Canada as part of the active AOP.

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Q: When are SAR managers required to activate an avalanche-validated dog team?

A: Where reasonably practical, SAR managers are required to activate avalanche-validated dog teams to all avalanche-related incidents, including recovery operations. The Active Avalanche Safety Program will provide information concerning the extent of the participation of the dog team.

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Q: Do we need to activate an avalanche-validated dog team to a non-avalanche rescue incident that occurs in an avalanche risk zone?

A: These operations require an ASO and AOPs. The ASO will make the determination of the need of specialised resources and identify these in the AOPs.

### **AVALANCHE SAFETY OFFICER (ASO)**

Q: What does “preferred” minimum standard of a CAA level 2 mean?

A: While the EMBC PSLV ASP does provide conditions for others to fill this role in certain hazard and terrain conditions, the preference is to always use a Canadian Avalanche Association (CAA) level 2, when available.



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Q: What does the ASO do?

A: The ASO is a skilled and experienced command staff member responsible for the avalanche risk assessment and AOP associated with the response. ASOs have advanced training, and the preferred minimum standard for a volunteer ASO is a CAA Level 2 Avalanche Operations certification.

Common duties of the ASO include the following:

- Identification of avalanche hazard zones
- Conduct preliminary and detailed avalanche risk assessments
- Assess site-specific safety and identify winter-related hazards
- Contribute to the development of the Incident Action Plan (IAP)
- Lead the development and implementation of the AOP
- Monitor rescuer progress and level of exposure to hazards
- Change, postpone, or terminate rescue or recovery activities that may pose imminent safety or health danger to the rescuers
- Use authority to take appropriate action to mitigate or eliminate unsafe conditions, operations, or hazards
- Document safe and unsafe acts, corrective actions taken on scene, accidents or injuries, and ways to improve safety on future incidents
- Investigate accidents that may have occurred within the incident area
- Maintain an activity log

The ASO is responsible for determining the requirements of the AOP, such as identifying the qualifications of the volunteers who will implement the AOP. The ASO will also set out the qualifications required by those who will be working in the avalanche risk zone. The function of ASO should be fulfilled by the most experienced and trained individual available.

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Q: Can the ASO fulfill the function of the ASSO?

A: Yes. Whenever possible, the ASO should operate independently of any other duties.

Q: When will a remote vs. onsite ASO be sufficient?

A: This will be dictated by the specifics of each incident, and the determination is ultimately made by the ASO. For the most part, consideration must be given to the following: avalanche, weather and snowpack conditions, incident location, accident site conditions, complexity of terrain, complexity of rescue requirements, proximity of the ASO to the incident, availability of suitably trained personnel (ASSO, avalanche rescue team leader, or CAA-trained avalanche team members), and the availability of information to establish an avalanche danger rating.



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### AVALANCHE SITE SAFETY OFFICER (ASSO)

Q: What is the role of the Avalanche Site Safety Officer?

A: An ASSO is required for all avalanche incident responses and is located on-site as part of a strike team / task force. The ASSO is responsible for evaluating the risk of further avalanches, identifying hazards or unsafe situations, monitoring on-site rescue operations, conducting field assessments, and implementing safety measures identified in the APO. The ASSO must at minimum have a level of training outlined in the ASP.

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Q: In the condition for on-site operations, it states that the ASO has final authority on initiating on-site operations, or they can delegate this decision. Who can they delegate this decision to?

A: The ASO can delegate this decision to the ASSO. It is recognized that the ASO may not have sufficient information available to them at the onset of the incident to make this determination and that a response may have to be initiated to investigate the avalanche accident site and/or gather weather, snowpack, and avalanche observations in the response area.

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Q: AOPs appear to be very complex. What are the expectations for a search and rescue response?

A: AOPs are incident-specific. AOPs for search and rescue response should primarily identify the avalanche danger level and implementation of risk mitigation measures such as avalanche terrain avoidance, the implementation of travel advisories for field teams, the use of personal protective equipment, and the ongoing monitoring of weather, snowpack, and avalanche conditions.

For ongoing operations (multiple operational periods), such as a ground search or extended rescue operation, the importance of gathering weather, snowpack, and avalanche observations, and using this information to plan field activities becomes more relevant. The requirement to collect such information would be identified by the safety officer when developing AOPs.

To aid in the rapid development and documentation of an Active Avalanche Safety Program volunteer, organizations can use the AOPs form in conjunction with other supporting material. Examples of supporting material include those identified on the ICS 305A form, maps and the GSAR Groups' Incident Response Plan.

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### RECOVERY OPERATIONS

Q: What level of risk is acceptable during recovery operations?

A: There is inherent risk in avalanche rescue work that should be mitigated as much as reasonably practical. Although risk may not be fully eliminated, it is expected that every reasonable effort will have been made to reduce the overall risk to rescuers to a minimum including the use of RADeMS throughout the recovery operation.



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Q: Do search and rescue teams have a responsibility to recover the subject's equipment?

A: No. Search and rescue teams have no obligation to recover a subject's equipment. The RCMP or Coroner may request as part of their investigation into the incident that certain items be recovered from an accident site. Individuals are responsible for their own property.